

STUDY SAYS LONG BEACHERS WATER WISE

City well prepared for future, new findings show

By Jason Gewirtz

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Friday, July 29, 2005 - LONG BEACH — Urban residents across California use 65 percent more water per day than residents in Long Beach, according to a study released by the Public Policy Institute of California.

The study examined water trends statewide to show how well water agencies are planning for future population booms. The nonprofit think tank also examined water consumption rates across different regions in the state.

The projected addition of 14 million new people to California over the next 25 years would expand the overall demand for water by 40 percent, the study found. It urged local water agencies to focus efforts on conservation, water recycling and groundwater banking, among other areas, to meet that growing need.

But Long Beach officials said Thursday they are ahead of the curve.

The average person in Long Beach uses 140 gallons of drinking, or potable, water per day, according to Long Beach Water Department data. The PPIC survey showed that the average urban resident statewide uses 232 gallons of potable water per day.

Long Beach officials attributed the difference to the city's conservation efforts as well as its use of reclaimed, or recycled, water that saves the potable water supply. About 7 percent of the city's water use is reclaimed water, which is used to irrigate city parks, golf courses and cemeteries.

In addition, the city is researching a desalination technology that could reduce the need to import potable water from outside the city. About 40 percent of the city's water supply is bought from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. The rest comes mainly from underground wells.

The city's conservation efforts have pushed for installation of low-flow toilets and appliances, and landscaping methods that require less water, among others.

"It's really changing people's behavior and lifestyle," said Kevin Wattier, the department's general manager.

Meanwhile, the desalination program took another step forward Thursday when the Water Commission approved a deal with the MWD for potential desalinated water. Under the deal, the MWD will pay the city up to \$2.5 million per year for 25 years if the city builds a full-scale plant and imports desalinated water into its drinking supply.

A test plant is under construction in East Long Beach. When construction is complete later this year, the city will study the technology for two years before deciding whether to build a full plant. If that plant is built, it could provide 10 to 15 percent of the city's water by 2012, Wattier said.